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## Second Committee

**Summary record of the 16th meeting**
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Wednesday, 18 October 2000, at 10 a.m.

*Chairman:* Mr. Hanif (Vice-Chairman) ..... (Pakistan)

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*In the absence of the Chairman, Mr. Hanif (Pakistan) took the Chair.*

*The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.*

**Agenda item 92: Macroeconomic policy questions**

**(d) Science and technology for development**

**Draft resolution A/C.2/55/L.3**

1. **Mr. Osio** (Nigeria) introduced draft resolution A/C.2/55/L.3 on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. The draft focused on proposals for strengthening the coordination of the mechanisms on the Commission for Science and Technology for Development, and promoting complementarity of activities.

**Agenda item 95: Environment and sustainable development** (A/55/95, A/55/99-E/2000/86 and A/55/357)

**(a) Implementation of Agenda 21 and the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21** (A/55/25, A/55/78-E/2000/56, A/55/94, A/55/120 and A/55/447)

2. **Mr. Desai** (Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs), introducing the report of the Secretary-General on ensuring effective preparations for the 10-year review of progress achieved in the implementation of Agenda 21 and the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21 (A/55/120), said that it was very important for the 10-year review process to revive the sense of political will and commitment, and address the types of issues of long-term sustainability that had been at the heart of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. That Conference had sought to integrate environment and development issues, with the economic, social and ecological dimensions, in one holistic approach. Some decisions would have to be taken at the current session including those relating to the venue and timing of the review, and the proposal that the tenth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development be converted into an open-ended preparatory committee.

3. The main activities undertaken so far were at the Secretariat level. The Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development had been working out how the task manager system could be used to support the review preparations.

4. Preparation at the national level was also important. Since 1,500 of the recommendations contained in Agenda 21 were addressed to national Governments, in many ways the real locus of action was at the national level. If sustainable development was discussed only once a year, when the Commission on Sustainable Development met in New York, then nothing could be achieved. There were various ways to ensure a vigorous and visible process of participation at the national level.

5. In order to ensure a certain compatibility between the reviews at the national, regional and global levels, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, in collaboration with other departments, had elaborated a framework for addressing the key issues and reviewing progress made in the implementation of Agenda 21, so that there was similar information available in the different types of reviews that would take place. In many countries those factors were already in place at the national Government level. The Secretariat had made some suggestions as to how to go beyond that and bring the issue to the public's attention, including identifying successful examples of sustainable development. That would be a public process, and probably not very expensive, because it would be run by national authorities at the national level. If it was successful in many countries, it might be repeated at the regional and global levels.

6. Another dimension would be a process which identified a sustainable development vision for the twenty-first century. Agenda 21 was a programme of action, while the Rio Declaration was a statement of principles; it was necessary to identify a forward-looking projection of how each country expected to achieve sustainable development over the twenty-first century. Some were already doing that.

7. As sustainability was so much an issue affecting young people, perhaps they could have a Children's Agenda 21 process, to introduce the issue in schools.

8. Another aspect would be to identify some sustainability goals for the country, at the national level, through a process of dialogue and provide a focus for the articulation of the vision of sustainable development at the country level. Again, that could be a very public process.

9. Those were some examples of the types of national-level activities that would bring the issue into schools, universities, communities, and workplaces. It might be useful to take the coordination arrangements that already existed in most countries and convert them into a kind of national preparatory committee for the 10-year review process.

10. At the regional and subregional level the Secretariat was already working closely with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and its regional offices and commissions to organize regional meetings and round tables for dialogue with civil society actors at the regional level; most of them would take place within the time period from March to November 2001.

11. On the analytical side, work was already under way. UNEP was working on the Global Environment Outlook (GEO) exercise which would be ready in time for the 10-year review, and an update of the critical trends report prepared for the five-year review should also be available in time. It would be advisable to make contributions in the early part of 2001, as Governments would be holding discussions from May 2001 onwards.

12. **Ms. Disano** (Director, Division for Sustainable Development), introducing the report of the Secretary-General on the measures taken in the United Nations system to accelerate progress in the implementation of Agenda 21 and the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21 (A/55/78-E/2000/56) said that it provided an update on the work of the Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development (IACSD), showing that organizations in the United Nations system remained firmly committed to implementing Agenda 21. It also showed that the United Nations system continued to face constraints in promoting sustainable development. Nominal-zero-growth budgeting had made it increasingly difficult for agencies to undertake new initiatives. At the operational level, closer collaboration was needed in project design and execution.

13. Turning to the report of the Secretary-General on conservation and sustainable development of Central African forest ecosystems (A/55/95), he said that over the past decade, Central Africa had received significant support from the international community, including from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), UNEP, the World Bank and other members of the Inter-Agency Task Force on Forests. Their activities had focused on institutional capacity-building and training for better governance, national forest programmes, forest assessment, harvesting, conservation of biodiversity, as well as enhancement of partnerships among different stakeholders, with the overall goal of decreasing the rate of deforestation. However, any solution to that problem would also require effective agricultural policies to minimize encroachment on forest land.

14. **Mr. Amin** (Director, New York Office, United Nations Environment Programme), speaking on behalf of the Executive Director, introduced the report of the UNEP Governing Council (A/55/25) and said that, as a first direct response to the recommendations contained in the report of the Secretary-General on environment and human settlements (A/53/463), UNEP had convened the first Global Ministerial Environment Forum, as a special session of the Governing Council. Attendance at that Forum had reflected the high priority Governments accorded to environmental issues. Civil society and the private sector had also made their contributions.

15. The outcome of the Forum — the Malmö Ministerial Declaration — recognized that the international community had the tools and resources to translate the ambitious global equation of sustainable development into concrete local actions; that there was an environmental crisis and that it could only be addressed through partnerships between Governments, the private sector and civil society.

16. The Declaration highlighted the discrepancy between international commitments and action. While the role of government was undisputed, it was also clear that effective partnerships were essential. Civil society had played a major role in putting the environment on the political agenda, and increasingly the private sector was faced with the responsibility of finding solutions to environmental problems instead of being a contributor to them.

17. Greater institutional and regulatory capacities of government and international organizations was needed. The Executive Director of UNEP had suggested the development of a Special Partnership Statement, that set down key principles and standards that UNEP and the non-governmental organizations expected of each other. The role of civil society should be developed, and greater commitment by the private sector encouraged so as to engender a new culture of

environmental accountability through the application of the "polluter pays" principle, environmental performance indicators and reporting, and the establishment of a precautionary approach (risk assessment) in investment and technology decisions.

18. According to the Ministers who gathered at Malmö, the objective of the 10-year review of the outcomes of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development should be to inject a new spirit of cooperation and urgency based on agreed actions in the common quest for sustainable development. Governments and UNEP should play a major role in the preparation for the review and ensure that the environmental dimension of sustainable development was fully considered on the basis of a broad assessment of the state of the global environment. The 2002 conference should aim at addressing the major challenges to sustainable development, and in particular the effect of the burden of poverty on a large proportion of the Earth's inhabitants, and the excessive and wasteful consumption of resources by the rich, that perpetuated the vicious circle of environmental degradation and increasing poverty. It should review the requirements for a greatly strengthened institutional structure for international environmental governance.

19. Turning to the report of the Governing Council of UNEP on activities contributing to the implementation of Agenda 21 and the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21 contained in document A/55/447, he said that it presented major and more recent programme developments, further addressed the issue of financing, and concluded by stressing that strong institutional arrangements were needed to ensure an integrated environmental policy as a component of sustainable development.

20. UNEP was already preparing the third Global Environment Outlook report, which was expected to be completed in 2002. To that end, it would gather and synthesize the knowledge of experts in scientific institutions around the world and take a 30-year retrospective and 30-year forward-looking perspective, with a view to reframing the way the international community understood and responded to the environmental challenges in the new millennium.

21. A number of other activities would also take place. Recently UNEP, UNDP, the World Bank and the World Resources Institute had published the World Resources Report 2000-2001, which was a major international collaborative effort to map the health of the planet.

22. UNEP was also preparing the third 10-year programme for the development and periodic review of environmental law, the Montevideo Programme III. It had been the seedbed for the development of international environmental law over the past two decades and continued to be an important instrument.

23. Finally he said that the report of the Secretary-General on international institutional arrangements related to environment and sustainable development (A/55/357) outlined the considerable progress made through initiatives undertaken by UNEP, convention secretariats and other partners of the United Nations system. The report demonstrated that coordinated implementation of the environmental conventions at the local level was essential.

24. **Mr. Mohammed** (Nigeria), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that Agenda 21 stood as a definitive blueprint for global action by Governments, the United Nations system and other stakeholders in their concerted efforts to reverse the negative impact of human behaviour on the physical environment and to promote environmentally sound and sustainable development in all countries. Thus far the results of the implementation of Agenda 21 had been mixed. The five-year review conducted in 1997 had revealed a trend towards elaboration of binding legal instruments as reflected in the Conventions on climate change, biodiversity and desertification, along with the mainstreaming of environmental issues into policies and programmes. However, the development dimension remained unrealized.

25. Lack of financial resources was widely acknowledged to be one of the major difficulties in implementing Agenda 21, and at the centre of that problem was the failure of the developed countries to honour their commitments made at the various United Nations conferences and summits of the past decade. Official development assistance and resource flows from developed to developing countries had increased only marginally, and that situation had been compounded by the external debt burden. The result was a widening gap in the implementation of Agenda 21 between developed and developing countries. Globalization, the information and communications revolution and biotechnology had also presented new

challenges. The majority of developing countries were unable to attract external private capital; their share in world trade had continued to decline, contributing to low levels of development and inadequate infrastructure.

26. The forthcoming review process should therefore focus on how to ensure a more effective implementation of Agenda 21. The Group of 77 endorsed the proposals of the Commission on Sustainable Development to hold the review in 2002 at summit level and away from Headquarters, preferably in a developing country. It emphasized the need for early and effective preparations involving the relevant agencies of the United Nations and the international financial institutions, as well as national, regional and international organizations. Voluntary contributions to a trust fund should be solicited to support the preparations and to encourage participation of representatives from developing countries in the preparatory process and the summit itself. The Group firmly believed that Agenda 21 should not be renegotiated at the summit.

27. The Group of 77 welcomed the Malmö Ministerial Declaration, which called for collaboration among Governments, the private sector and civil society in the pursuit of a new culture of accountability.

28. The central problem in the implementation of Agenda 21 remained the lack of financial resources; improvements must be made in the flow of financial resources, including the bold step of outright cancellation of the external debt of developing countries. The effectiveness of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) as a financial mechanism required that criteria for project selection should be simplified and its base expanded to allow it to mobilize new and additional resources for the environment. Current efforts to increase its activities in the area of capacity-building and transfer and adaptation of technology were therefore encouraging.

29. The Committee had a duty to devise integrated strategies to foster a programme of action for an effective review of Agenda 21 that could enhance and promote sustainable development in all countries.

30. **Mr. Le Gargasson** (France), speaking on behalf of the European Union, the associated countries Cyprus, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and Turkey, said that the European Union attached great importance to the implementation of the commitments made at the Rio Conference, and therefore the success of the 10-year review planned for 2002 was among its priorities. It welcomed the decision by the Commission on Sustainable Development to use its tenth session as a preparatory committee for that meeting.

31. The European Union also expected that summit-level event to reaffirm the commitment to sustainable development centred on its social, economic and environmental pillars. It believed that the 10-year review conference should be called the world summit for sustainable development. The links between environment and poverty, health and security, the reversal of the trend towards depletion of natural resources through more efficient use, changes in production and consumption, strengthening of the institutional architecture for sustainable development and analysis of new challenges and opportunities since the Rio Conference were among the topics that should be addressed at the summit. Civil society, including the business sector, should be closely involved in the preparations.

32. On the subject of the international instruments on environment and sustainable development, the European Union reaffirmed its view that the various conventions were at different stages of implementation, and greater cooperation among their secretariats and governing bodies was essential to increase their impact in the field. It welcomed the efforts of UNEP in that regard, and hoped that the Environmental Management Group would help to enhance the synergies among those instruments. In that context, the European Union would prefer to see the conventions on desertification, climate change and biodiversity addressed in a single General Assembly resolution.

33. **Mr. Leiro** (Norway) said that inadequate attention to environmental issues had both a direct and indirect impact on the health and livelihood of people throughout the world. Environmental factors were responsible for almost a quarter of all disease in developing countries, with women and children the most vulnerable. For development to be sustainable, it must flow from the priorities of a particular society. Accordingly, environmental protection must support poverty eradication through economic and social development. Experience had shown that measures that benefited the global, regional and local environments,

such as the use of more efficient and cleaner energy technologies, could promote a number of development objectives.

34. However, the estimated resource requirements for implementing Agenda 21 were far from being met. Official development assistance remained pivotal, particularly for the least developed countries, and must act as a catalyst for policies and initiatives promoting sustainable development.

35. The ninth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development should provide an opportunity to address issues related to energy and transport and pave the way to better solutions. Worldwide, energy was used inefficiently because of outdated technologies and practices. In some countries, 80 per cent of the population were without secure access to basic energy services. Plans for the future must take into consideration regional perspectives and potential, which would provide opportunities for increased efficiency and to explore comparative advantage across national borders.

36. In order to mobilize public support and media attention for the 10-year review conference, the meeting should have a vision for the future. Among themes that should be included in its agenda, he listed poverty eradication, mobilization of capital for development financing, linkages between the environment, health and conflict prevention, and corporate responsibility in promoting sustainable consumption and production patterns. The need for cross-sectoral integration of policies should also be emphasized, particularly in areas related to energy, water and land use.

37. **Mr. Dausá Céspedes** (Cuba) said that the hard work of the various environmental agencies and bodies had not been able to overcome the real and growing problems faced by almost every country and region. Globalization had contributed to the irreversible destruction of the environment and non-renewable natural resources, degradation of the land, the atmosphere and the oceans, and a totally unsustainable model of consumption. The gap between the richest 20 per cent of the world's population and the poorest had doubled in the past 30 years. The fight to prevent soil degradation and ensure the preservation and rational use of water resources and biological diversity could not wait, as the current world population of 6 billion was expected to double by the end of the century.

38. His Government was aware of the need to harmonize the need for development with the need to preserve the world's limited natural and economic resources. The commitments it had made at Rio were an integral part of its national development and environmental policy.

39. Despite the economic, commercial and financial blockade which had been imposed by the United States of America for almost four decades, Cuba was, as a matter of priority, implementing a policy aimed at achieving sustainable development through solving its main environmental problems. Those efforts included environmental education. Cuba's urban and rural areas were currently supplied with drinking water to the extent of 98.5 per cent and 79.4 per cent respectively, and the corresponding figures for environmental sanitation were 93.6 per cent and 82.5 per cent; 47 research projects related to environmental protection and 52 to the sustainable development of the mountains.

40. The results of Agenda 21 and of the Barbados Programme of Action had been minimal since implementation required financial resources which the developing countries did not have. Developed countries must face up to their ecological debt to mankind by honouring their commitments regarding Official Development Assistance (ODA), providing new and additional financial resources on an adequate and predictable basis and transferring environmentally sound technologies on favourable terms. In addition, the world must demand that the greatest emitters of greenhouse gases fulfil their commitments under the Kyoto Protocol.

41. It was essential to find concrete solutions to problems and to make serious decisions that were backed by the political commitment of all parties. Cuba would continue to participate actively in the Agenda 21 review process because it believed that the only way to halt the deterioration of the environment was by implementing Agenda 21 and the Barbados Programme of Action.

42. **Mr. Hemayetuddin** (Bangladesh) said that rich and poor alike must look seriously for ways of implementing Agenda 21 rapidly and effectively. For the developing countries, and the least developed countries in particular, poverty and financial constraints made the task even more challenging; accordingly, his delegation supported the creation of a

trust fund and it also welcomed the idea of establishing an environmental management group and the move to form the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction.

43. Bangladesh had made sincere efforts to prioritize environmental concerns in development decision-making, and had enacted laws for the protection of the environment, setting up "green courts" to deal with their violation. Bangladesh had also formulated a national environment management action plan and ratified all major international conventions, establishing a national coordination mechanism for sustainable development in the form of a National Environment Committee headed by the Prime Minister. Bangladesh's experience was that the eradication of poverty and the empowerment of people could both be achieved through implementing programmes along the lines of the Grameen Bank. The recommendations of the fifth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development regarding the eradication of poverty should be implemented in full. Bangladesh also wholeheartedly welcomed the recent efforts of the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) Subcommittee on Water Resources, specifically its preparation for the publication of the biennial World Water Development Report.

44. The socio-economic difficulties of the least developed countries were aggravated by environmental problems which, in turn, were accentuated by complex and interrelated factors such as population pressure, cross-border movements of displaced persons and natural and man-made disasters. Moreover, their share in global trade was insignificant. Bangladesh, therefore, called for increased technical assistance and greater access to the markets of the developed world.

45. Given the threat posed by the continued emission of greenhouse gases Bangladesh called upon all major producers of greenhouse gases to agree on a specific time-bound target for the reduction of such emissions. It also strongly supported the establishment of the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests (IFF).

46. Bangladesh hoped that the developed countries would come forward with an open mind to protect the global environment from disasters, a number of which, such as the destruction of wildlife and the growing hole in the ozone layer, were the result of modern scientific civilization. Bangladesh called on the developed countries to extend adequate resources to protect the world and make people concerned about their responsibilities towards nature.

47. **Mr. Wibisono** (Indonesia), speaking also on behalf of the member countries of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN), expressed support for the Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development (IACSD) in its efforts to foster closer coordination within the United Nations system in order to address the lack of effective programme delivery.

48. Despite the progress made since the Rio Conference, the state of the global environment continued to deteriorate, with various reports indicating that many countries in the Asia and Pacific region were experiencing extreme environmental stress in a number of areas, including urban air quality, water resources, biodiversity and coastal resources. The recent financial crisis in the region and current levels of poverty and unemployment raised a serious concern that in their efforts to regain economic growth and momentum, the countries of the region might find it too difficult also to promote sustainable development.

49. There was an urgent need to implement the Barbados Programme of Action and the outcome of the twenty-second special session of the General Assembly on the review and appraisal of the implementation of that Programme of Action. Strong and immediate steps should be taken by the international community as a matter of priority to reverse the acute shortages of fresh water in Central Asia.

50. There was a need to reiterate commitments fully to implement Agenda 21 and the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21. Those countries that had fulfilled their ODA commitments of 0.7 per cent of GNP were to be commended. Despite the Asian financial crisis the countries of the region had done their best to implement national and regional strategies for environmentally sound and sustainable development with the adoption of time-bound action plans and programmes and commitments to implement the provisions set out in all the relevant outcomes of the Rio Conference. Improvements had also been made in updating environmental laws and policies, strengthening institutions, improving decision-making processes and striving towards greater capacity-building. At national level progress had been made in reforestation, the conservation of biodiversity, the revival of rivers and the rehabilitation of coastal areas, but there were indications that the pressures of negative

environmental change continued to outpace nations' individual and collective efforts to make progress, largely because of lack of capacity, technological capability and financial resources.

51. One of the critical challenges in the Asia region was to raise the consciousness and promote the involvement of all relevant sectors. Organizing the 10-year review in the Asia and Pacific region would greatly enhance the sense of urgency, awareness and ownership among all the people, and would increase their motivation to translate regional and global commitments into concrete actions. But those efforts should be accompanied by serious efforts on the part of the developed countries and international organizations to implement all their commitments regarding financial assistance, transfer of technology and capacity-building. Organizing the review in Indonesia would set a good example to the international community: Indonesia had the fourth largest population in the world and was currently undergoing a transition towards a more democratic government and system of civil society while facing tremendous economic problems and continuing to give high priority to the issue of environment and sustainable development.

52. **Ms. Enkhtsetseg** (Mongolia) said there was increasing recognition of the need urgently to address threats to the environment resulting from such things as rapid population growth, accelerating urbanization, the unsustainable exploitation and depletion of biological resources and land-based sources of pollution. Technically, the international community had the financial, human and technological resources to cope with the challenges of sustainability and to redress environmental degradation. The question was whether it had sufficient political will and solidarity to forge the genuine partnership needed to turn commitments into action. Her delegation hoped that practical action would emerge from the 10-year review, and strongly believed that there was a need to set clear goals for the review process, including a global commitment to a renewed North-South partnership and a higher level of international solidarity to promote sustainable development.

53. The General Assembly should set in motion the preparations for the review, taking into account the recommendations of the Commission on Sustainable Development (A/55/120), particularly the recommendation that the Commission at its tenth session should be transformed into an open-ended preparatory committee. Mongolia was particularly interested in the anticipated regional and thematic Agenda 21 round tables.

54. Mongolia was the seventeenth largest country in the world in terms of territory, but much of it was unproductive and either desert or highly susceptible to desertification and drought. In the past 20 years its forested area had shrunk significantly as a result of forest fires and timber production. To tackle those and other challenges Mongolia had launched its own national sustainable development agenda for the period up to 2020. The key components of the Mongolian Action Programme for the Twenty-first Century were sustainable social development, sustainable economic development, proper use of natural resources and protection of the environment, and means for implementing the programme for social development and public participation, encompassing national capacity-building, legal, institutional and monitoring functions.

*The meeting rose at noon.*